

“This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! Salvation can be found in no one else.”

I don't want this to be true!

Because, let's face it, if this is true, doesn't that mean that you and I bear an incredible burden?

If Jesus is the only way to salvation, and you and I know and are followers of Jesus, then it is on us to get the word out!

How are you doing with this?

I'll admit this to you: If Jesus is the only way to salvation, and this depends on our telling everyone in the world, I am not doing so well.

If Jesus is the only way to salvation and it means us becoming this, I'm not doing so well.

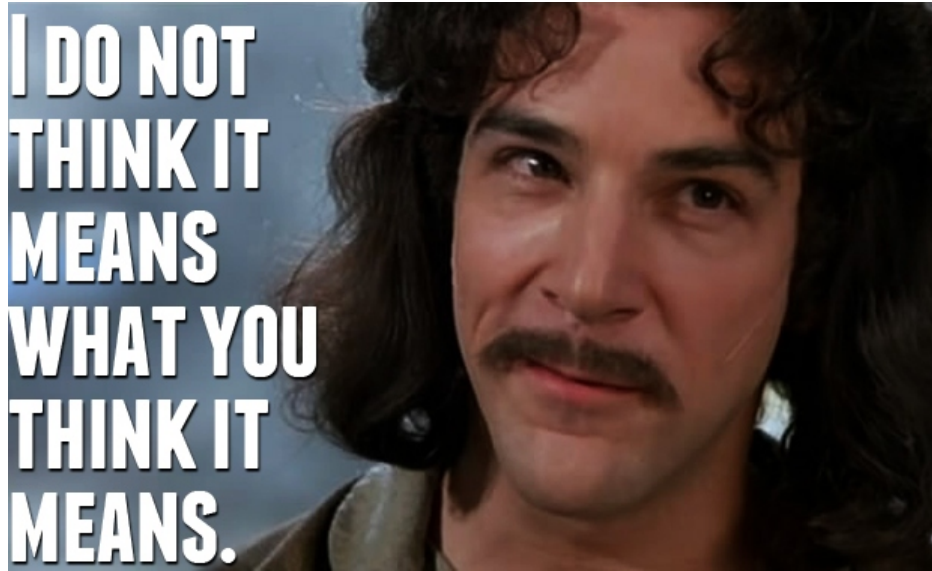
<clip from [Bullhorn](#) by NOOMA(clip starts at about 8:50)>

If it means taking bibles around the world, but having to teach people English just so we can then hand them a bible, I'm not doing so well.

If it means training the rest of the world to dress like us and act like us - that 'real' Christians dress nice this way or that way I'm not doing so well..

If it means leading with morality - a set of behaviors you better not do! - I'm not doing so well.

But all this all reminds me of something a famous person once said. When it comes to Jesus being the only way to salvation, I echo my friend Inigo Montoya in saying , “I do not think it means what you think it means.”



Peter and John are summoned to -ok, they are brought before - the High Priest and his family - apparently the leaders of the Religious Establishment to answer for their acts on Solomon's Porch the day before.

"By what power or in what name did you do this?"

I think this was a rhetorical question. I think it was more of a way of saying, "Who are you to do what you did right outside OUR Temple?!"

Well, Peter answered. Answering, Peter said:

"Leaders of the people and elders, are we being examined today because something good was done for a sick person, a good deed that healed him? If so, then you and all the people of Israel need to know that this man stands healthy before you because of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved."

Notice how Peter begins his answer: with respect. "Leaders of the people and elders...." The Book of Acts is the history book of the early church. The first church - how it started, how it spread.

We know the Christian Church originally grew out of the Jewish religion. Peter and John - along with the rest of the Apostles - considered themselves good Jews.

Good Jews respect their elders and the leaders of their people. They were God's own people!

And now - here in the text, the leaders of God's own people are questioning the power to heal.

Today, Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. (that's [1 John 3:2](#))

We are God's people. We've been given this precious, precious message of Good News! The Good News isn't only good news for us; it is intended (by God) to be good news for everyone!

The good news is this (as Paul summed it up [1 Timothy 1:15](#)): "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I'm the biggest sinner of all.

So, a brief recap: the leaders of God's people get bent out of shape over the healing that God did on the Porch outside the Temple.

It's like God only works through the proper channels. (Dear God, would you please heal my aunt's sister's brother-in-law? If yes, please fill out this form in triplicate. Or register through the appropriate web portal. Amen)

Why do God's people get so possessive of God?

Where do we get off claiming that God can only work in the ways we understand?

What makes us think we've got such a grasp of the world, much less of God, that we can get so controlling?

While we're on this, here are some other questions:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?

Tell me if you know.

Who set its measurements? Surely you know.

Who stretched a measuring tape on it?

On what were its footings sunk;

who laid its cornerstone,

while the morning stars sang in unison

and all the divine beings shouted?

Who enclosed the Sea behind doors

when it burst forth from the womb,

when I made the clouds its garment,

the dense clouds its wrap,

when I imposed my limit for it,

put on a bar and doors

and said, "You may come this far, no farther;

here your proud waves stop"? (Job 38:4-11)

If we have that much claim over, or control of God, then we have indeed made God in our own image. The bible says that it is actually the other way around. We are made in God's image! So are they!

If we want to understand what it really means that "Salvation can be found in no one else" but Jesus, we've got to let go of our claim to control exactly what that means and how it looks. We've got to acknowledge that God does things beyond us, without us, yes, sometimes even in spite of us!

Maybe looking to Jesus' own words from this morning's reading will help. Jesus said, "I have other sheep that don't belong to this pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Jesus has sheep that aren't part of this flock.

God can handle more than one thing - more than one flock - at a time!

The Kingdom of God is present! Come, enter the Kingdom! God's Kingdom is here and now and there and there.

God's Kingdom does not depend upon us, but welcomes us to be a part.

We are invited to live as part of God's Kingdom here and now!

But it is God's Kingdom, not yours, and (certainly) not mine!

Peter begins his address politely, with respect (inspired by the Holy Spirit): "Leaders of the people and elders..." but he quickly takes it in a direction they are not comfortable with. "Jesus Christ the Nazarene -- whom you crucified..."

Technically, the Jews didn't crucify Jesus. Rome did. That would make it too easy, though, to be able to blame the government for the bad things that happen. The Jews - God's people - were complicit in Jesus' death.

We are all complicit in Jesus' death. his death wasn't caused by someone else - not even those people the good southerners would look down at and say, "bless their heart..."

Just as we are all complicit, Jesus died for us all. For everyone. Not just those in the "in" group. Not just those in the right church, and not just those who have all their beliefs right and reducible to a neat little list.

Jesus died for us all. And all means all, right?

Well, if Jesus died for us all, then I'm thinking we re-read this again, keeping that in mind.

This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved

The builders rejected Jesus as the stone on which to build. What were they building? (What were WE building?)

They thought they were building God's Kingdom. We thought we were building God's Kingdom. We think we are building God's Kingdom.

(Why is it Springsteen's ["Glory Days"](#) always comes into my head when I think about these things?)

From the earliest echoes of the presence of God we have heard of God's love for us. Walking in the Garden, ["Adam, Adam, where are you?"](#) God is calling out in love - utterly everlasting, patient, faithful love.

God. loves. us. ALL. A few chapters into Genesis, God calls one man - and in that man, one family. This man and this family are called - invited - to be a part of what God is doing to redeem and restore all men and all families.

They accept the invitation. We accept the invitation. Their following God's lead and direction was always imperfect, as is ours. But at their best God blessed them - and others through them. At our best, God blesses us and others through us.

Even at their worst, God watched over them. Even at our worst, God watches over us.

Sometimes, I imagine God still comes very close to us and says, "Where are you?"

[Joseph was sold by his brothers](#) (siblings within the family of God's people act a lot like other siblings) into slavery. Years later God turns this into good. Joseph, with his God-given gifts has become 2nd in command in Egypt when a famine arises in the land where God's people live.

They go looking for help, and there is Joseph, perfectly placed to help them.

[A couple generations later, these people are enslaved, and they call out to God for help.](#)

[God always hears the cry of the needy, the oppressed](#) (see v. 33).

God delivered them and led them to their own land - the Promised Land

God still hears the cry of the needy, and the oppressed, and God still delivers them.

Within a couple of generations, God's people got comfortable; probably too comfortable. They felt privileged - and why not!? They were chosen by God himself!

They got to the place where they felt the privilege without the responsibility of being God's people.

God would raise up kings and prophets over the years to call to them, to say, "where are you?!"

We likewise run the risk of feeling privileged as God's people. And God continues to call, saying, "Where are you?"

God continues to build God's Kingdom. and God calls you and me to be a part.

If there is one word for God's Kingdom, for the way God continues to show up, to hear the cry of the needy, and of the oppressed.

That word is Jesus. Paul writes in Colossians that, ["All the fullness of deity lives"](#) in Jesus (Colossians 2:9).

Salvation can be found in no one else - because God is a good God, a big God, a beyond-our-understanding and beyond-our-limits God.

And ***Jesus is how we know who God is and how God is.***

If saving is happening anywhere, God is doing it. And the word we use, the name we name to understand how it is God saves, is Jesus.

When we get to thinking we are the builders of God's Kingdom, we reject Jesus. When God builds God's Kingdom, it is all built on Jesus.

When we start defining what our church we forget that God builds the Kingdom, we don't. There's a difference between describing and defining! Let me explain: We, Eules First United Methodist Church, need to wrestle with this right now. We are at this incredible moment. The expansion of Airport Freeway over the next 3 years opens a window of opportunity for us to really reach for what God wants us to be over the next 40-80 years.

Now, to understand what (or who) God wants us to be over the next 40-80 years, we have to describe ourselves but not define ourselves. We seek God's lead to define us!

We may describe ourselves as a small church. We may not define ourselves as a small church - because if we do, we end up doing things that limit our growth - that limits our openness to following God's lead. And: [we are not a small church!](#)

Perhaps what we mean, those who call us a small church, is that we aren't a megachurch. We're the kind of church where everyone knows everyone else.

No, we aren't.

You don't know everyone. I don't know everyone. That group size tops out at about 120. We have more than twice that every week.

If our goal is to "stay small," we are defining our church, and not letting God build the Kingdom through us.

If our goal were to "be a big church," or even "to become a mega-church," that, too, would be us defining our church, and not letting God build the Kingdom through us.

As those who are part of this Church, and all who at least feel welcome in it: we always run the risk of becoming like those who had Peter and John arrested, and brought them to have to answer for what they did. We are complicit. And ***what 'we' did to Jesus says what we think of God. What God did in Jesus says what God thinks of us***

How do we get to be a part of that Kingdom? Pay attention. Serve others, Follow Jesus.

Jesus IS the one in whom and through whom God saves. And Jesus is at work in us, through us, around us. IN spite of us.

[Come, enter the Kingdom!](#)